

LIVING ON EARTH WITH A DIVINE NATURE - Part one

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Pastor Don Horban, Cedarview Community Church, Newmarket

DO WE HAVE EVERYTHING WE NEED TO BE SPIRITUALLY STRONG IN THIS CORRUPT WORLD?

2 Peter 1:1-4 - "Simeon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who have obtained a faith of equal standing with ours by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ: [2] May grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord. [3] His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, [4] by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire."

We're going to look at four key truths in two studies. Two this week and two next. Notice that phrase, "...to those who have received a faith of equal standing with ours..." Peter is a Jew. He is writing to these early Christians, many of whom were Gentiles. Some had come out of still different religious backgrounds. And the thing to notice is that Peter doesn't measure their faith by its *sincerity*, nor by the *length of time they had been in it*, nor by how *passionately they practiced it*.

All of those traits, by the way, have become the standard of measurement of our society for the validity of any religion. They're the measuring sticks used by our society in evaluating the "*people of faith*." And even that title shows we evaluate these things by *sincerity of practice* rather than *objective truth content*.

But that is not the view of the New Testament. Peter says he's writing to people who claim a relationship with God - people who claim a knowledge of God - who claim forgiveness of sin and eternal life. And he says he knows their claim is valid because *they share the same faith he embraces*.

Think about that. This is nothing but intolerance in the opinion of our culture. Faith, Peter says, is measured, first of all, *by its content, by its object*. The New Testament refuses the modern inclination to *psychologize* religious faith. The New Testament, while recognizing the inward transformation Christ brings, measures the *truthfulness* of the Christian faith *outwardly in events of history* rather than *inwardly in the mind*.

Also, we see that the Christian faith is a *proselytizing* faith. "*Your faith must be the one I'm writing to you about*." Christians are rapidly moving away from this kind of argument. We place *tolerance* toward diversity and *what works therapeutically* for individuals above *specific absolute truth content* where religious views are concerned. Not so Peter, as he writes under the direction of the Holy Spirit of God.

Here's what Peter stresses:

1) FAITH IS DEFINED AROUND THE PERSON AND WORK OF JESUS CHRIST

2 Peter 1:1 - "Simeon Peter, a *servant and apostle of Jesus Christ*, To those who have obtained a faith of equal standing with ours by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ...."

Don't get bent out of shape when we read "*Simeon*" Peter in this verse. The earliest manuscripts (on which the ESV is typically based) frequently use "*Simeon*" as an equivalent to the more familiar "*Simon*." In fact, even the NASB - which uses "*Simon*" - includes a footnote stating that the earliest manuscripts use "*Simeon*." So it's a six of one, half a dozen of the other kind of thing.

Here's the very important phrase in that first verse: "*...by the righteousness of our God and Savior, Jesus Christ*"(1). This is the heart of the faith. You and I need to be righteous. Almost everybody knows we need to be more righteous than we are. Almost everybody knows something is wrong with humanity. We are constantly making a moral mess of things. We're civilized. We're certainly intelligent. But we all know we aren't deeply, consistently righteous.

So this is the issue of all religions. Mankind needs help. And all religions have some proposed solution. Some stress the need for deeper thought and meditation. Some stress the need for acts of charity and kindness to others. Some stress the need for seclusion and isolation from the world. Some stress the need to keep certain laws and regulations of holiness. And all of those things have some place in a devout life. *But they are never the starting place in knowing God*.

Peter immediately links together righteousness with something **God has done for us**. And he says that what God has done for us is **specific, not nebulous**. It is done first in **outward acts** - not in our **heads**. He has done something in our own space/time history. He has done something concrete **through Jesus Christ - 2 Peter 1:1** - **"...To those who have obtained a faith of equal standing with ours by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ..."**

So Peter isn't hesitant to boldly claim the identity of the **faith of the Apostles**. That's the cornerstone of Christianity. **"You have received a faith of equal standing with ours, by the righteousness of our God and Savior, Jesus Christ."**

Yes, you must be right with God. Yes, you must be righteous and holy because God is just and hates all sin. And so you read the commandments and see the requirements. You make your resolutions and strive to be better than you were before. But you find something in you that rebels against the light. You can't measure up.

So God comes along beside. He does for us what we cannot do for ourselves. He doesn't just offer **instruction**. He doesn't just offer a **message** to try to live by. He offers **Himself** in sacrifice. He comes and **pays Himself for the sin and wickedness of mankind**. **He comes and satisfies His own terms of justice**.

And that's the message. No other kind of righteousness counts. Other good works must be the **fruit** of this freely given righteousness through Jesus Christ, but no amount of good works will stand before God **apart** from the righteousness that God supplies through Jesus Christ.

Peter lays this foundation again, not because it's too complicated to understand, but because it's the one cornerstone of Christianity that never ceases to be **pulled against** by both the religious and the non-religious.

You will never live as a Christian in this world when this conviction will rest peacefully in your hands. The spirit of the age labors to lure the careless mind into seeing this central truth as both **intolerant** and **unreasonable**. Peter reminds these Christians because he knows this truth must constantly be **re-fastened** to our souls by the Word and Spirit of God Himself.

And this immediately leads Peter into his next point:

2) **ONCE YOU KNOW WHAT YOU HAVE IN CHRIST JESUS, YOU MUST GROW AND INCREASE IN IT**

2 Peter 1:2 - **"May grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord."**

There is always the need for **balanced teaching** when we look at these great doctrines of the faith. Peter emphasizes two sides of the same truth. We need to understand **what God has done in Jesus Christ** first of all. We could never do this for ourselves. Then, after that, we need to understand **what we must do for ourselves - what will never be done for us**. You **can't** do what only God has done in Christ Jesus. And God **won't** do what you must do to grow in Christ's finished work.

Notice how the pieces of this second verse all fit together. If you're going to thrive and flourish in this Christian life, you need to stand up against trial, temptation, and the corruption that is in the world.

Peter is going to address this wicked pull of the sinful desires of our fallen hearts and the lure of the world upon all of us in **verse 4** - **"...by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire."**

If you and I are going to stand strong in the faith we need God's help. We need the **strong influence of God's grace on our lives**. We can certainly **use** our wills in our choosing to please God but we can't **change** the direction of our own wills to start with.

This is so important. This is the key difference between **godliness** and **morality**. I'm required not only to **keep** the rules, but to **love** the rules as an expression of God's character and heart. And only God through Christ by His Holy Spirit can make this transformation in my heart. O how lost we are without free, unearned, justifying grace!

But we must **grow** in this grace. We are powerless to grant our own hearts assurance. We can't stand up against the accusations of the devil and the sting of our own conscience unless we are sure of the blood of Jesus and the

power of God's grace. We need grace to be not only *given*, but **"multiplied"**(1:2).

The power of grace, being multiplied in our minds and hearts, is what sustains **peace with God**. There are people in this world who live in fear of death and especially judgement. They have no peace because they know they aren't right with God.

There are others who live for all the enjoyment and pleasure and wealth they can possibly find in this world. They have no rest because this life is all they think they have. The clock is their enemy. They are frantic about finding as much happiness and gusto that they possibly can.

But people who are sure of **God's grace in Jesus** are people who live with **peace**. They have peace because they stand clean before God. It's the regenerating Holy Spirit who **"...bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God"**(Romans 8:16). So they are content in their hearts because they know **who** they are, they know **why** they are here, and they know **where** they are going after this life is over. We can't manufacture this for ourselves.

So **verse two** teaches that grace and peace are precious possessions for the Christian. But it also teaches something else of equal importance - **grace and peace aren't just mental concepts that get stamped lifelessly into our minds**. They aren't just **static labels** to Bible doctrines. Grace and peace can **grow**. Yes, they are freely given. But they can and must be **"multiplied."** That's the word Peter uses. They can be powers that lead to holy and powerful living and witness.

This is the main point of **verse 2 - Grace and peace can and must grow in their influence in our lives**. Grace grows as the knowledge of God grows. Peace grows as the knowledge of God grows. That's why Peter says, **"Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord"**(2).

You can't live just on inspiration. You can't survive just on worship choruses. You won't be able to feed indefinitely on feelings of happiness and euphoria. Where the knowledge of God is lacking, the flow and impact of grace will dry up. The sense of peace with God and joy and strength in Jesus will evaporate.

That's why, as we saw earlier, the Scriptures are called the **"word of His grace."** And that's why Peter, in this same letter will say, **"But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ...."**(2 Peter 3:18).

You can't **love** what you don't take the time and effort to **know**. There was a time when you didn't love your husband or wife. Not only didn't you **love** them, you didn't even **know** them. But you met. You dated. You spent endless hours - probably to your parents torment - on the phone. You took the time to find out what presents you should buy for them. You learned what made them happy or sad.

And yet, tragically, there are many, many Christians who put more effort into knowing and loving their cats and dogs than they do knowing Jesus. There are thousands of Christians who know more about the playoffs than the Sermon on the Mount. There are Christians who can sing all the top twenty hit songs who could never recite twenty verses of the New Testament.

And to all of us alike Peter would say **"Grow in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord! You must grow!"** One hour on Sunday morning isn't anywhere near enough. A verse pulled out of a promise box won't cut it. **Grow**.

Next week we'll look more specifically at how Peter says this can happen.